



# **Simplifying the language of Project Design Monitoring & Evaluation (DM&E)**

**June 2010**

Oak Foundation wants to support projects which demonstrably contribute to achieving positive change within a number of different sectors. We want to enhance understanding of what works and encourage the expansion of successful interventions. We want the learning generated to influence policy and practice in our respective fields of interest.

Oak believes that design, monitoring and evaluation are key tools for achieving these aims. However, we also recognize that the language and process of project design, monitoring and evaluation varies and can be confusing as funders and implementers alike use the same words to mean different things. This mystification of DM&E can obscure rather than clarify the answers to three fundamental questions:

- \* **What is the problem?**
- \* **What are we going to do to address it?**
- \* **How will we track progress?**

Good design is about developing a project strategy that:

- \* **is relevant**
- \* **makes explicit links between the problem identified, what you want to achieve and how you intend to achieve it**
- \* **establishes how you will be able to track progress along the way.**

It uses evidence from other projects and/or research to inform the approaches chosen, but builds in regular monitoring to see if they are working as planned. Good design, monitoring and evaluation support effective, responsive interventions, generate clarity about achievements, encourage improvements in quality and facilitate ongoing learning.

This paper provides a brief outline of design, monitoring and evaluation for Oak grantees, and suggests terminology that can be used across all the programme areas of Oak Foundation.

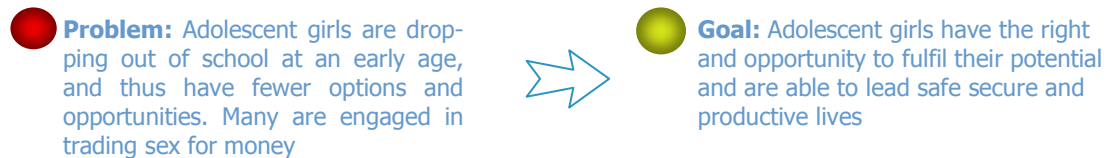
## 1. What you want to achieve; *the language of design*

### 1.1 Ultimate Goal of the project;

**A goal summarises the changes or differences the project wants to achieve.**

The goal should be a clear and simple statement of the changes in the situation to which you aspire. It represents the “big picture”, and provides the rationale for the project. This will not be achievable with a one-off effort; it may require other organisations and a number of interventions. Nonetheless it should be evident that the proposed project will make a substantial contribution to achieving the goal.

*Example 1*



A good understanding of the situation is critical for designing a project. The best designs reflect the target population’s priority needs, their assets, **and** the strengths of the organisation. The issues and problems to be addressed by the project will be identified through an **assessment or situation analysis<sup>1</sup>**, that will include data from a range of sources (including the target population’s views) that help outline both opportunities and challenges related to meeting these needs. This should precede the detailed project design<sup>2</sup>.

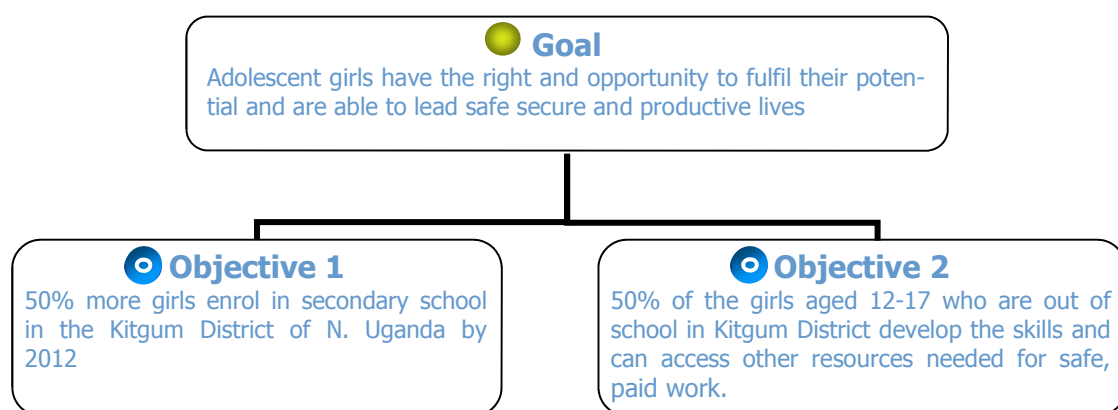
### 1.2 Objectives

**Objectives are the key changes that will happen as a direct result of the project and contribute to achieving the goal.**

The key questions for deciding on objectives is “What has to happen to make the goal a reality?” and “For which of these is this organisation responsible?”

While the goal is not something that the agency can achieve on its own, the objectives are; these are the changes that the project will bring about. It is critical that the link between the problems, the objectives and the goal is clear and that these changes will address the problems identified and contribute towards achieving the goal. There are often several complementary objectives that contribute to achieving the goal.

*Example 2*



<sup>1</sup>This is not the same as a baseline which is a much narrower set of measurements that help to show change in some key variables over the life of the project. See below.

<sup>2</sup>In some cases, organisations may need resources to undertake an assessment. In other cases, data will already exist as a result of previous work or other assessments.

Given that the objectives are the changes for which the agency is responsible, they need to be written in a way that allows the organisation to track if the project is being successful. They should be SMART<sup>3</sup>.

## **2. What you do and what happens when you do it; the language of implementation.**

### **2.1. Assumptions about change.**

It is important to acknowledge that the process of change is often complicated and involves a number of steps, i.e. a “ladder” in which each rung brings that change closer. Being clear about each small change and how it leads to the next one helps ensure that none of the steps that are essential to achieving the objective are omitted.

Projects make **assumptions** about change. Some assumptions are valid, based on reliable evidence (e.g. vaccination results in lower rates of measles infections in a population). Sometimes assumptions may not be valid (delivering a workshop will result in better practice). By acknowledging and challenging some of the assumptions at the design stage, there is an opportunity to think of additional activities or inputs and the incremental changes that will in turn lead to the anticipated result (e.g. workshop + mentoring + assessment leads to sustainable changed practice).

### **2.2. Activities** ➡

**Activities are what a project or organisation does to achieve its objectives.**

An application generally includes only the major activities, enough to give a clear indication of what you plan to do to achieve the objectives. It is important that the links between what you do and what you expect to achieve as a result of these activities are clear and logical, i.e. based on evidence or a reasonable assumption. The activities chosen need to clearly address the problems identified in the assessment.

*Example 3*

**Overarching Problem: Many girls not in school and with reduced opportunities, as a result of family poverty and an unsafe school environment.**

**Objective 1**  
50% more girls enrol in secondary school in the Kitgum District of N. Uganda by 2012

**Contributory Problem:**  
**No latrines/water for girls to use safely and discretely when menstruating.**

**Activity:** Build latrines and water points in school that are safe and accessible for girls

**Contributory Problem:**  
**Families cannot pay school fees**

**Activity:** Provide income generation activities to families on the condition that their school aged children are in school.

**Contributory Problem:**  
**Teachers sexually abusing girls**

**Activity:** Support the development and integration of codes of conduct for teachers in schools



<sup>3</sup>SMART= Smart, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

Each activity contributes towards achieving the objective, but generally this will be through a series of incremental changes. One way of framing the different results expected at each step is as **outputs** and **outcomes**. Activities often result in the production of certain goods and services – the *outputs*. These outputs contribute to changes in behaviour – the *outcomes*.

### 2.3. Outputs

#### **Outputs are the goods or services delivered by the project**

Outputs can be the trainings conducted, public awareness campaigns delivered, child protection committees established.

<b>Activity</b> 	<b>Output</b> 
Build latrines and water points	Better sanitation facilities available in school
Business skills training for parents	Family income increases
Code of Conduct developed	Teachers trained on code of conduct



These outputs are needed but on their own may not cause the change described in the objective to happen. Usually a series of incremental changes, including a change in behaviour, will be needed to achieve this. Outputs are important but should not be presented as the highest level or only results that the project will measure and report on.

### 2.4 Outcomes

#### **Outcomes are the changes in behaviour, benefits and learning that happen as a result of the project.**

Outcomes are often the key changes needed to achieve the objective.

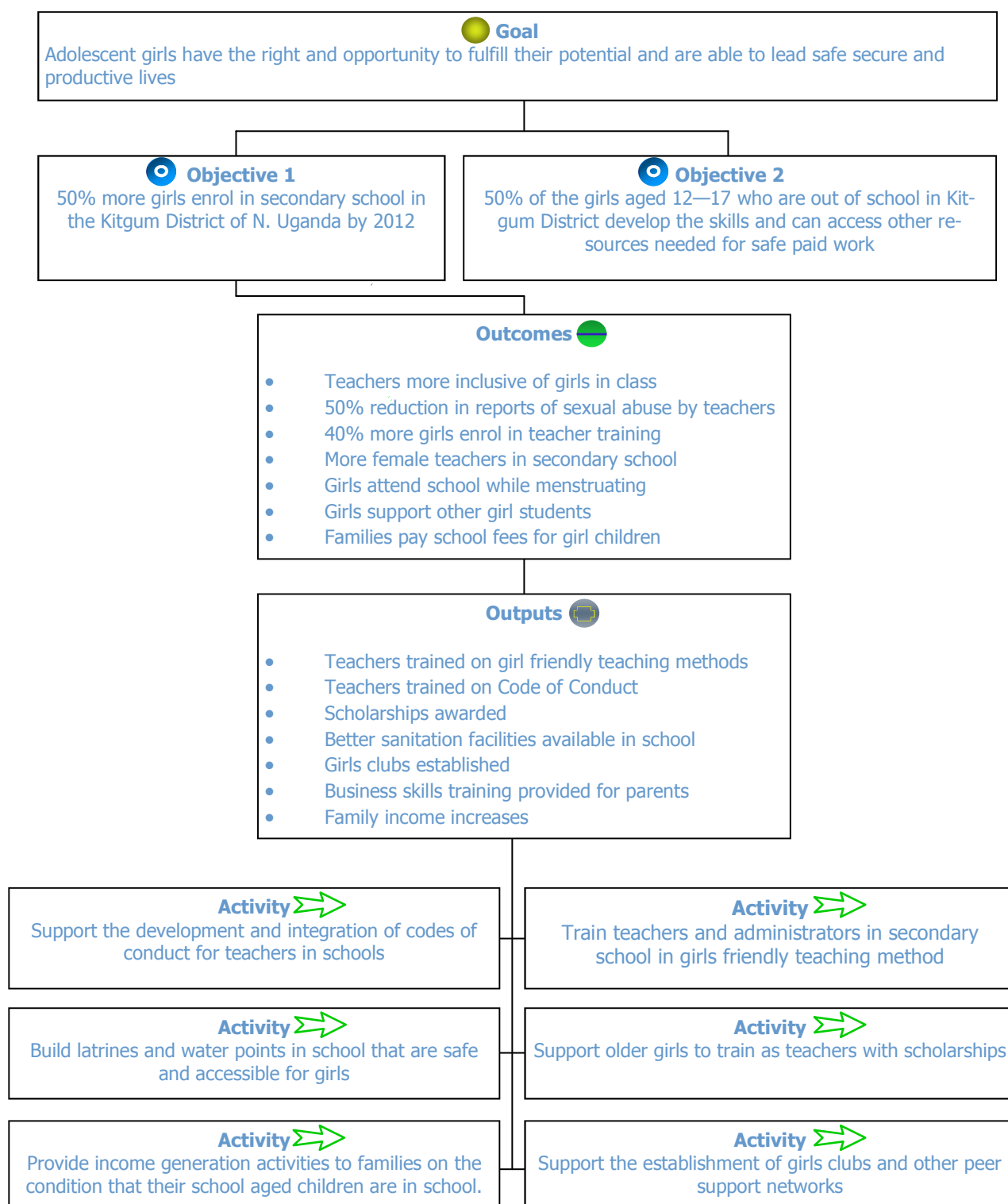
The project may have to *assume* that these changes will take place, as the project cannot force an individual or group to respond in a pre-determined way to new information, trainings, facilities etc. The assumption should be tested through monitoring of what actually happens in practice. If the hoped for change fails to happen, then some adjustment in the project will be needed.

<b>Output</b> 	<b>Outcome</b> 
Better sanitation facilities available in school	Girls attend school during menstruation
Family income increases	Parents pay school fees for adolescent girl children
Teachers trained on code of conduct	Fewer teachers engage in sexual abuse of pupils

Many of the goals that organisations and projects want to achieve do not happen all at once. They happen as a result of many smaller changes that add up to the desired change. These “**interim outcomes**” can be useful in showing that a complex or long term project is working effectively and is on track to reach the objectives.

#### **Often we think that being SMART about DM&E means that only quantitative results are important.**

In much of our work we know that changes such as an increase in confidence or change in attitude can be crucial aspects of change. These **qualitative results** may be less easy to count, but it is usually possible to find creative ways to measure some of them, often by asking target populations themselves to report on what has changed for them. **Quantitative results** are often easier to document and report on e.g. an increase in girls’ enrolment in school. They are not better than qualitative results, simply different.



A template is available at Appendix 1

## 2.5 Impact

**Impact is the broader or longer-term change that that happens as a result of an intervention or interventions.**

The best projects support positive change in the lives of the target populations and generate long term, sustainable improvements. They may also have a wider influence on practice and policy beyond their immediate target area or population. Often a number of programmes, policies and other events combine to generate these changes; in most instances a single project will **contribute** to these changes rather than be solely responsible for them. In general, organisations should refer to this contribution rather than claiming to be the sole driver of the larger and long term impacts.

## 3. How are you doing; the language of Monitoring and Evaluation

### 3.1 Baseline

**The baseline is information about key variables at the start of the project.**

The baseline provides a clear starting point. It differs from the assessment which gives the broad overview and helps determine the project focus. The baseline looks at those variables that have been selected as indicators (see 3.2) to measure change as a result of the project activities. Collecting **baseline** information at the start of a project allows a comparison of the situation (as reflected by the chosen variables) before and after an organisation intervenes, to track change over time.

The tools and methods used to gather data will vary depending on the variable that is being measured. They might include observation (using an observation tool to get consistent results), meetings, formal records (such as school records), interviews and focus groups (e.g. with beneficiaries, staff or other community members).

### 3.2 Indicator

**An indicator is what an organisation will measure to show progress.**

Indicators are the variables<sup>4</sup> that will be measured or monitored over the course of the project; they specify what will be measured (e.g. number of girls enrolled in grade 6), not what will be achieved (e.g. 50% in girls' enrolment). To be useful, an indicator must reflect what the project wants to influence (e.g. If a project aims to increase *access to services* for trafficked girls and women in a specific location, then you the numbers using the services must be measured, not the number of services being offered). When you want to measure something that is particularly sensitive, it may be necessary to find a proxy or substitute indicator, one that indirectly measures it.

It should be relatively easy to collect information consistently on the chosen indicator, without requiring too much additional work. In some programme areas, it is important to gather information other than numbers. If the project aims to support child friendly teaching methods, structured observation of teaching practice or focus groups with children to find out about their experience of learning are useful ways to gather data that can be compared over time. It is helpful for projects to specify their sources of information (the means of verification).

Indicators are measured to see if targets or milestones are being reached, if outputs, outcomes and objectives are being achieved. Thus indicators should be identified for **all of these different levels**.

Areas of expected change	Baseline data	Indicator	Means of verification
Girls' enrolment in secondary school (objective level)	Current number of girls in secondary school	Number of girls in secondary school	School enrolment records
Teaching methods that are inclusive of girls (outcome level)	Girls being asked to respond to questions in class	Girls being asked to respond to questions in class	Class observation tool
Better sanitation facilities available in school (output level)	Girl's comments on condition of school latrines.	Girls comments on condition of school latrines	Focus group discussion record

<sup>4</sup>Characteristics or items of data that should vary as a result of project activities

### 3.3 Target

**Targets tell you specifically how much change you plan to achieve in key indicators, at specific points in the life of the project.**

Targets are the specific measurement (qualitative and quantitative) of an indicator that shows the extent of change you aim to achieve during the life of the project.

### 3.4 Monitoring

Monitoring is regularly collecting data, reviewing data, reporting the results and using the data to make corrections in project implementation, so that the expected targets are achieved. Monitoring allows project staff to see the expected and the unexpected, the good and the not so good outcomes of project activities and to adjust or refine the initial design accordingly.

While failing to monitor is a major mistake, so is trying to monitor too many indicators. Indicators are selected to provide useful information about the key elements of the project and to help in communicating results. Monitoring should not distract from implementation or use a disproportionate amount of project resources. A project should focus on just a few indicators that look at all of the levels of change and not just at the level of the outputs (e.g. number of trainings held).

The frequency with which the data would be collected will vary; with more complex results, the data collection method will be more complicated and time consuming. Changes will often be slower, so measurement should be less frequent.

Reflection on the data involves comparison of actual and expected results, looking for an explanation for variances, planning what needs to be changed in response and communicating this to all stakeholders. Reporting “bad news” is as important as reporting achievements; it helps project staff to reflect on reasons for the short-fall, and make adjustments in the project’s activities.

Most of this monitoring work is internal to the project. Oak staff also undertake monitoring of project implementation through project Progress Reports, phone calls, and site visits which may include discussions with staff, members of the target communities and other stakeholders.

Monitoring is important – it allows projects, organisations and funders to review progress and make adjustments during the life of the project so that it delivers the changes that are needed. Planning for Monitoring and Evaluation takes place at the Project Design phase, to ensure adequate time and resources are included in the budget and workplan. Coupled with good design, good monitoring (including acting on the information gathered), is probably the biggest single contributor to improving programming<sup>5</sup>.

### 3.5 Evaluation

**Evaluation is a retrospective review of one or more aspects of a project, examining its design, implementation and/or the results it delivered.**

Evaluation differs from monitoring but complements and uses the information generated through monitoring. It is generally a discrete event that happens midway through a project and/or at the end.

Designing a good evaluation is like designing a good project. Evaluations should not be just an account of “what happened” and what outputs were produced; they should be part of the ongoing learning about effective programming or policy making. Often evaluations are most useful in the context of innovative approaches or with new partners or partnerships.

The purpose of each evaluation needs to be clear and realistic. At times, what can be answered by an evaluator will depend on what information was collected at the beginning of a project, the data collected along the way, and how the process of implementation has been documented.

Evaluation questions might include:

- ✦ Did the project achieve its objectives? If not, why not? What can be learnt about effective practice from this project?
- ✦ Did it reach the target group?
- ✦ What unintended consequences did the project have, for whom?



- ✦ What else have can be learnt about project implementation, e.g. management support, staffing and other resources?
- ✦ What can we learn about costs relative to results?
- ✦ What changed for children?

Knowing these helps determine the type of evaluation and methods that will best answer them (internal/ external, extent of participation envisaged, focused on process or the results). In many instances it will be important to ensure that children, families and communities can participate in the evaluation process as they will often be the people who know how their lives have changed as a result of the project – or not.

## **DM&E Checklist**

### **Design phase**

- Is the project based on a good assessment of the situation and specific operating context?
- What is the project trying to achieve, what's the ultimate aim? Does it show what is expected to change for children?
- Is the approach consistent with Oak's principles; child centred, participatory, resilience or strengths based; Rights Based?
- Is a baseline planned?
- Do the objectives logically and reliably contribute to achieving the aim?
- Will the activities, outputs and outcomes deliver the objectives?
- How do we know this - is the proposed strategy based on agreed best practices? Is it piloting a new approach?
- Are the objectives, outcomes, outputs, and activities SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound?
- Are the layers or step changes identified?
- Will the chosen indicators reliably show progress?
- Is the implementation strategy, including monitoring and evaluation, accurately reflected in the budget?

### **Implementation and monitoring**

- Is the agency collecting the data regularly?
- Is there a process of reflection, revision and reporting on the information?
- Do reports reflect challenges as well as achievements?
- When and how will Oak review progress?

### **Evaluation**

- Are the evaluation questions clear?
- Will the evaluation provide lessons about what worked and why?
- Is the evaluation plan consistent with information that will be available to the evaluator?

#### **Sources:**

Charities Evaluation Services - Jargonbusters No 1  
 MercyCorps, 2005; Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Guidebook  
 Emergency Capacity Building Project, 2007; the Good Enough Guide – Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies  
 IRC, 2005; Guide to design, Monitoring and Evaluation  
 Gosling and Edwards (2000), Save the Children UK; Toolkits: A practical Guide to Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Assessment.  
 USAID – Assessing and Learning 2008  
 GTZ – Monitoring and Evaluation of projects to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children 2007  
 CIDA, DFID and SIDA guidelines on Monitoring and Evaluation

APPENDIX 1

